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Early Professional Socialization of University Students in Russia

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Abstract

The article considers peculiarities of future sociologists' personality formation during the first steps of training in higher educational settings. Special attention is paid to the verbal influence directed to conceptual changes in university students reflected in their behavior. The interdisciplinary approach discussed helps to solve the problem of verbal influence on the students' attitudes towards future profession and their career strategies. According to the study findings based on quantitative and qualitative research methods, social determinants of professional self-identification have been revealed. It was shown that early professional socialization affects the formation of future professionals' values and civil position.

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1. Introduction

The development of modern society on the way to that of information is characterized by dynamism and an accelerating pace of social changes that lead to increasing demands for competitive professionals with a high level of competence and able to adapt to changing conditions of social reality. The problem of professional training, development of professional skills and formation of professional values is becoming more and more relevant and socially significant. Professional training is a rather long process. Professionalization begins within the period of studying and continues throughout one's whole life.

The study presented was focused on the process of professional socialization of university students majoring in sociology. The interest in the profession of a sociologist may be explained in different ways. First, this is a fairly "young" profession in Russia compared to "traditional" ones of a doctor, a lawyer or an economist. Secondly,

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historically sociology as a science and as a profession has evolved in the Russian system of education controversially and this significantly affects the professional development of sociologists. Thirdly, it is sociological education that allows of forming competencies that are the most popular in the society during the periods of economic crises. Local military conflicts also intensify global competition and increase the demand for professionals able to think analytically and actively influence institutional changes to implement strategic social projects.

The formation of professional values has been considered by many domestic and foreign scientists. Professional activities have always been of great scientific interest. The problem of professional socialization is studied in pedagogy, psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, etc. There are various scientific approaches to understanding professional socialization. The notion *socialization* is used to show the process of students' selective acquiring of values and attitudes, skills and competences. As known, Merton (1968) conceptualized basic principles of forming a professional community and professional ethos (see also Lazar, 2010), while as early as at the beginning of the twentieth century Weber highlighted personal qualities needed to become a professional in politics (Weber, 1918/1946a) and science (Weber, 1918/1946b).

The problem of youth socialization and community was considered by Homans (1961) in the framework of his social exchange theory. The issues of socialization in an unstable society in the context of the anomie theory (Durkheim, 1964; Merton, 1968) seem to be essentially important in the world's current situation. As shown in (Merton, 1968), the purpose and nature of education is tightly connected with young people acquiring the dominant culture, norms and values. Sorokin (1947) investigated the impact of education on social mobility and social status and concluded that professional knowledge and skills are the basis of professional stratification and have an effect on the society structure. Education and professional socialization are observed from the perspective of the resource approach in (Bourdieu, 1972). In Russia the problems of education and professional socialization have been intensively studied since the second half of the twentieth century. Mironova (1999) investigated the structure and development of professional identification.

Of great importance for our research are the works devoted to studying sociologists' professional activity. The concept of sociology as a profession appeared in the United States, primarily due to Parsons (1959) who defined sociology as a profession and created a new discipline called sociology of professions, see also (Yudin, 2013). The study of sociologists' professional values and specific features of this profession development in Russia was carried out by Abramov (2013).

Thus, various aspects of young people's socialization and professional development as well as the development of professionalism, including the profession of a sociologist were considered in the works of foreign and domestic authors. However, the literature review on the problem under consideration, our research experience and impact of teaching staff enable us to suggest that the problem of becoming a professional is quite relevant and significant and requires further studying and deepening.

2. Research methodology

2.1. The concept of professional socialization

Professional socialization and the formation of professional values and orientations determine characteristics of future specialists' activity and opportunities for their professional development. In addition, professional socialization affects the development of business qualities, skills and ultimately influences the development of professional fellowship and the society's professional structure. It should be noted that the concepts of *professionalism* and *professional socialization* in the scientific literature are often defined as synonyms. However, in our opinion, they have significant differences. *Professional socialization* continues throughout one's whole life. The concept of *professionalism* in its broad sense means the development of the society's occupational structure, while in its narrow sense it is the formation of professional groups with specific interests and values as well as professional positions and roles. In relation with the individual it is accompanied by the formation of not only knowledge, skills and professional views about socio-professional standards adopted by the professional community. Professionalization of a person in the broadest sense, also involves two interrelated components. First, the formation of professional self-identification, the development of an individual's internal personality structures, i.e. the psychological aspect of professionalization as it is reflected in the concept of *professional development*. Second, the

formation of professional knowledge and skills based on the professional standards and the formation of personality as the subject of professional activity, i.e. the social aspect of professionalization as it is reflected in the concept of *professional socialization*.

Professional socialization is defined in (Baghiryan, 2008) as the process by which a person acquires certain professional values via including them in his inner world and forming professional consciousness and culture, both objectively and subjectively, when preparing for professional activity. Professional socialization is considered to be a social process which results in the assimilation of social and professional norms and the formation of personality as the subject of professional activity. It should be emphasized that we follow an interdisciplinary approach to understanding this process. Such an approach enables to reveal specific features of professional determinants to explain the inconsistency of some social practices to provide professional growth and self-identification.

2.2. Research objectives

The study was aimed at analyzing peculiarities of forming professional values and skills in the students trained at the sociological department. Their motives of profession choice as well as their characteristics of professional socialization, life plans and career strategies as future sociologists were in our research focus. The key aim of this study was to identify social factors that influence the success of professionalization at the early stage of career training in higher educational settings in Russia and to show how professional socialization is brought about.

To achieve the goals set, the following objectives were formulated:

- To identify factors influencing the professional socialization of the students studying at the sociological department and to find out how verbal professional communication between specialists and students affects the profession choice (whether future profession of a sociologist is prestigious and why);
- To determine characteristics of professionalization in social agents (student groups, lecturers, family members, public organizations, qualified sociologists);
- To define career prospects for future sociologists (who is considered to be the most successful sociologist);
- To identify the students' opinions regarding the profession's prestige and to determine their impact on the process of primary professional socialization.

2.3. Methods

To achieve these objectives, we used a combination of complementary methods, namely theoretical analysis of verbal communication, content analysis of documents, a survey of students and graduates (who had received Bachelors of Arts Degrees from Tyumen State University since 2006). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the students who were currently studying sociology in their first, second, third and fourth years at the University. In total, 43 students and 15 graduates took part in the study.

2.4. Research findings and analysis

The results of the interviews showed that the vast majority of the respondents had chosen this profession themselves. However, tips on choosing such a professional way were given by their parents, relatives, tutors, and friends who had got sociological education and were successfully employed according to their specialty.

Analyzing the respondents' answers we can distinguish the arguments that served as the basis for choosing the profession of a sociologist. Among the main factors are:

- Job prospects: *This profession is quite widely-spread and I will be employed in the future or find an interesting field of activity; Sociologists are needed for the society as well as doctors;*
- A conscious interest and "calling": *I studied in the socio-humanitarian class at the secondary school and I had a great interest in social sciences, so I chose sociology; My relatives and friends were against my choice, but my interests played the role;*

- Availability of tuition fees: *In choosing my future profession the financial aspect plays an important role, so the main argument for the choice was the presence of the vacant places free of charge.*
- “Random” flow: *The choice was made by chance, i.e. nobody advised, because nobody had ever heard about this speciality.*

The analysis of the results obtained showed that the majority of the respondents had chosen their future profession by chance. They knew nothing about the professional activity of a sociologist. It was often identified with the profession of a social worker or a specialist in marketing.

The next question in the interview was connected with the clarification of the occupational prestige of being a sociologist. Three quarters of the respondents replied affirmatively to the following question: Do you think the profession of a sociologist prestigious? Among the arguments young people mentioned were the relevance and social significance of this job, its practical value in solving specific social problems (e.g. *I think the profession of a sociologist is prestigious because the study of any society is the basis for functioning all over the world; Sociology is respected in the modern world and the level of its prestige depends on how much attention the government pays to its funding*).

However, there were some students who did not believe sociology to be a prestigious profession, explaining their point of view as follows: *It is not quite prestigious because it is extremely difficult to find a job; The profession of a sociologist is not prestigious because sociology research is not well financed*. The argumentation presented in favor of “non-prestige” of the profession of a sociologist is mainly based on the three most common factors, namely problems with employment, low salary, and paperwork. In our opinion, all these arguments show the lack of life experience in the respondents, their uninvolvedness in socio-professional groups as well as the uncertainty of public opinion on the profession of a sociologist (employers have not fully understood the role of a sociologist in the enterprise yet).

Negative public opinions on the profession of a sociologist may be explained by the way of its development in Russia. There were times when sociology was recognized as pseudoscience and professionals were persecuted and even departed from the country. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the twentieth century sociology in Russia was developing rapidly and almost did not lag behind the countries of Western Europe. Russian sociologists, Professors Evgenii de Roberti and Maksim Kovalevsky, were invited to European and American universities to deliver lectures. In other words, those first scientific studies being carried out in Russia and those first theoretical concepts were interesting for the international scientific community.

It was the time when the first sociological department appeared. Kukushkina (2002) mentioned that the process of approval of this new field of knowledge in Russian universities was influenced by political factors and that the first attempts to deliver systematic sociological courses were taken at the faculties of law, although sociology was considered to be a part of political economics. The first Russian department of sociology was founded in the Psycho-neurological Institute in Saint Petersburg in 1907 (for details, see Novikov, 1996) and in 1920 the first faculty of sociology was founded in Petrograd State University, where Pitirim Sorokin was the Dean. After the period of *taboo* on sociology in Russia, the first departments of sociology were reestablished in Russia in 1984 at the faculties of philosophy of Moscow State University and Leningrad State University. In contrast to that, there were more than 200 sociological faculties in the United States (6000 graduates). In American institutions of higher education 900,000 Americans were taught sociology annually. The first 50 graduates as qualified sociologists appeared in Russia in 1989. Thus, the profession of a sociologist in Russia is quite “young” and very controversial in public opinion.

Analyzing the experience of the students’ participation in professional events, we tried to figure out what was the effect of these activities on the formation of an interest in the profession. As the resulting effect of participation in such events the students show both positive and negative attitudes. Most of the meetings took place within the forums associated with sociology or related fields (*I would like to make these meetings more informal; Speaking at the conferences with representatives of the expert community and young scientists we discussed new research ideas; This communication made great impression, i.e. it evidently forces me to move forward and it is very exciting when you realize that you may be a member of sociological community*).

The graduates who participated in the study considered the stages of their professional development. Sociologists-beginners were offered to describe their first professional experience in detail and to identify levels of their career

growth. Most of the young professionals needed a period of adaptation to meet the employers' requirements. The knowledge they had gained during their training at university was useful. Their first jobs were in organizations engaged in marketing research, human service enterprises, municipal and national authorities. Professional tasks were simple but required certain responsibilities (e.g. to collect empirical data, to prepare for interviews, etc. The work seemed to be rather monotonous. Thus, evaluating the first professional experience, nearly all the study participants mentioned responsibility, importance of the work being done, and hope for future prospects. The respondents were asked to dream about their future career of a sociologist. It can be concluded that the students were adequately informed about possible strategies of developing a career as a sociologist (e.g. management of a private centre for marketing research; writing a doctoral dissertation on the problem of sociology; membership in the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences; publications in prestigious sociological journals; research activities of the highest level; participation in the world social and political organizations; worldwide recognition).

3. Discussion

Early professional communication with qualified social scientists helps students to evaluate possible career prospects. Professional interaction should take place from the very first stages of studying in order to intensify the process of learning and continue professionalization later. Communication should include such scientific events as sociological forums, conferences and festivals, meetings with famous scientists from other cities (it is important to note that in the list of successful professionals the University lecturers were also mentioned), meetings in enterprises where students can get acquainted with professionals and be advised on their diploma papers or sociological research projects as well as research technologies.

Language activities are considered as part of human behavior. As pointed out by Maturana (1970), communication is a process of mutual coordination through verbal and non-verbal sign systems. The success of achieving *behavioral homomorphism*, the implications and consequences of communication depend very much on the factor of mutual trust. The problem of verbal exposure over many years remains one of the central problems in social psychology. An interdisciplinary approach to solving the problem of verbal impact, an appeal to universal communicative constants and their consideration in the framework of cognitive linguistics can contribute to the linguistic knowledge of communicative activity. The essence of communication is not only an information exchange but also joint comprehension of a subject. Each communication process is actually given in the unity of activity, communication and cognition. As Boldyrev (2014) highlights, the basis of creating and understanding the meaning of a statement is determined by our knowledge about the world, including both collective and individual experience.

In the context of the language-game concept (Wittgenstein, 1953) any institutional discourse contains such speech acts as orders, descriptions, arguments, jokes, greetings, etc. Such a discourse can be interpreted as multi-level learnt patterns having verbal and non-verbal nature. The ability of words to create and maintain social relations or, in other words, the creative function of the social discourse is undeniable (see also Karasik & Gillespie, 2014). Discourse is the speech coupled with the action. Bourdieu (1989), the author of the well-known concept of symbolic power, emphasizes that "symbolic power is the power to make things with words" (p. 23).

From the socio-psychological perspective social impact is seen as the result of behavioral activity of human interaction in terms of joint activity and communication. Our behavioral intentions, expectations or plans do not always find expression in reality. Based on the analysis of his research Cialdini (2001) came to the conclusion that basic mechanisms of social influence can be grouped into categories, each corresponding to one of the fundamental psychological principles underlying human behavior, namely reciprocity, commitment and consistency, social proof, scarcity, liking and authority. The principle of reciprocal exchange is based on the tendency of most people to return courtesy for courtesy. The principle of commitment and consistency comes from the fact that on making a decision most people consistently implement it even in cases when there is a risk or a threat to their own interests. The principle of social proof implies the tendency of an individual to follow the beliefs and behavioral patterns shared by others. The principle of liking or personal sympathy says that people tend to comply with the requests and demands of those who they like. In particular, numerous studies have demonstrated the influence of physical attractiveness on attitudes and behavior. The principle of authority in the context of the influence problem illustrates the difference

between the individual-specific and functional role influence. In fact, the first is a manifestation of “power of authority”, while the second is the “authority of authorities” (van Dijk, 2008). Bourdieu (1991) notes that a communicant’s “significance” is determined by his symbolic capital, recognition and authority gained in a social group.

Thus, communication is a complex multi-dimensional process of establishment and development of contacts between people that is generated by the needs of joint activities including the exchange of information, developing a common strategy for interaction, perception and understanding of other people. According to Leech (1983), communication can be viewed as problem-solving. In the process of communication people share the results of perception of different objects, knowledge, experience, as well as research, residential or educational information. Interacting, they reach agreement on joint work and rest; establish the unity of ideas, attitudes, views; reach the community of thoughts, experiences, attitudes to different events, other people, themselves. Moreover, communication is a significant factor in the complex process of social determination of human development. Vygotsky (1986) noted that the thought never equals the direct meaning of the words. Therefore, the communicating parties must be identical not only in their lexical and syntactic systems but also in their understanding of the communicative situation.

The nature of information exchange between people is determined by the fact that through a system of signs partners can influence each other. In other words, the exchange of information necessarily involves the partners’ behavior, i.e., the sign changes the state of the participants in the communication process. Communicative impact is a result of the information exchange and is possible if the speaker and the recipient have the same or similar system of codification and decodification. Any exchange of information between them is possible only under the condition that the signs and, more importantly, their assigned values are known to all participants of the communication process. To describe this situation, social psychology borrows from linguistics the term *thesaurus*, denoting a common system of values taken by all group members. But the thing is that, even knowing the values of the same words, people can understand their social, political or age-related features in different ways. Institutional communication in the educational environment as a kind of cliché communication is a strictly regulated type of verbal action. Its core characteristics standardize the participants’ communicative behavior, providing a high degree of social control, standard rigidly prescribed scenarios, a limited choice of communicative strategies and tactics.

4. Conclusion

The study showed that university students’ early professional socialization helps them to develop a sense of professional self-identification. It allows forming personal and professional qualities necessary for their future job, the ability to analyze social phenomena, to perceive information, evaluating it on the subject of objectivity and reliability; honesty and social responsibility. The most important is verbal professional communication with experts during educational and training practices. The attendance of special events, conferences and forums affects professionalization positively. A cognitive speech strategy of persuasion as a method of influence on an individual’s consciousness through logical, rational evidence of the truth is most appropriate. The process of rational persuasive impact includes the use of information and arguments to change the intentions of the target audience. Through social comparison people receive information that enables them to assess the fidelity of their subjective preferences. The necessary successive steps in the change set up a listener by means of rational persuasion which includes: presentation, attention, comprehension, and acceptance. Repeated presentation of the message increases the likelihood that it will be paid attention to, understood and learned. Repetition also contributes to a strong and categorical installation of reactions. The effect of repetition is evident in studies of simple presentation. The final stage of persuasion includes posting changes in the installation and implementation of a new pattern in behavior. The objective of these steps is the formation of clear and categorical units.

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